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LEBANON

The US defense attache in Damascus early this morning observed a large convoy of transporters loaded with armored personnel carriers moving along the Damascus-Beirut road from a point six miles west of Damascus. The convoy included a very few tanks and miscellaneous vehicles such as ammunition, water, fuel, and kitchen trucks.

Farther west, the attache sighted a convoy of empty transporters returning to Damascus. The attache could not reach the border because of heavy road traffic and confusion, but was certain the column extended to the border, a distance of another nine miles.

The attache believes these forces are from the Syrian 3rd Armored Division. It is normally stationed just north of Damascus.

Israel so far has not reacted militarily to the Syrian initiative.

Israeli news media reported that the seizure of Al Masna early yesterday was probably intended to force the Lebanese parliament, which is to convene today, to move quickly to elect a new president. [REDACTED]

The Israelis may consider the presence of Syrian troops near Rashayya, and the size and composition of the Syrian force, to be a threat to Israel's security. Israel's reaction will depend largely on the size of the force, how much armor it possesses, and whether it moves farther south.

If a sizable portion of the Syrian 3rd Armored Division has in fact entered Lebanon, Israeli forces are virtually certain to go on high alert, reinforce the northern border area, and mobilize some reserves.

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The Israelis may conclude that they must make limited incursions into far southeastern Lebanon to take up good defensive positions. Such a move would allow Israeli forces to control important road junctions and prevent Syrian forces from moving into southern Lebanon.

We believe that the Israelis are not likely—on the basis of the extent of Syrian intervention identified thus far—to resort immediately to more drastic measures such as the occupation of southern Lebanon or a preemptive strike on the Golan front. Such actions probably would be taken only if the Syrian move were determined to be a direct threat to Israel's security on the northern border.

Syria's intervention in eastern Lebanon presumably is intended to meet a number of immediate needs:

- To eliminate the threat to the cease-fire posed by the large leftist, Muslim, and independent Palestinian militias based in eastern Lebanon and along the main highway closer to Beirut.
- To resupply and reinforce the increasingly ineffective Syrian-controlled units of the Palestine Liberation Army in the area.
- To force the Lebanese parliament to act quickly to replace President Franjiyah with a successor acceptable to Damascus.

In fact, the Syrian move has stalled political progress in Beirut. Leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt, who earlier this week had cautiously approved Damascus' efforts, said last night that the war in Lebanon has taken a grave turn for the worse; he condemned Syria for "resorting to escalation at a time of truce without any justification."

Jumblatt has not indicated that he will boycott the meeting of parliament today, but he almost certainly will now be disinclined to compromise with Damascus on the question of who should replace Franjiyah. Jumblatt ordinarily would accept any of several weak Maronite Christians as president, but is believed now to be cooperating with independent Palestinian groups and probably the Egyptians to promote Raymond Edde, a maverick Christian leader who has attacked Syria's involvement in the Lebanese dispute. [redacted]

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ARGENTINA

Mounting political violence is emerging as a major headache for President Videla's new government.

Dozens of people have died in clashes between forces of the left and the right since the military take-over on March 24. Urban guerrillas are attacking police and security officials, while rightists are mounting a campaign of reprisals that so far has taken over 20 lives.

In dealing with the renewed warfare, the junta must walk a fine line between seeming to carry out Videla's pledge to keep the antiterrorist campaign within legal bounds and doing what is necessary to suppress the violence.

The activities of the right-wing vigilante groups are particularly troublesome for the junta. It was widely believed that such actions were condoned, or perhaps even inspired, by the Peron administration. The junta can ill afford to acquire the same reputation. Indeed, there is no indication that it has given even tacit approval to the killings of leftists by off-duty police and security officials.

Even so, the exploits of vigilante groups could quickly dissipate the relative good will the public has shown the military government. The junta is aware that it needs all the sympathy it can muster at home and abroad to proceed successfully in critical areas like the economy.

Military advocates of harsh repression view the continuation of left-wing violence as an argument in favor of the tough measures they have proposed all along. The left hopes to provoke precisely such repression, in the belief that the eventual result would be popular repudiation of the military government.

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ISRAEL

Candidates sympathetic to the Palestine Liberation Organization are expected to get a substantial number of votes in the West Bank municipal council elections on Monday, even though powerful clan support probably will ensure the re-election of many of the conservative incumbents who are running.

A total of 577 candidates are contesting 205 municipal council seats in 24 West Bank towns. Eighteen incumbent mayors and 115 incumbent council members are running for re-election.

Prospects for the Palestinian nationalists appear best in the West Bank's two largest towns, Hebron and Nabulus, where the conservative incumbent mayors are not running. In Hebron, a nationalist slate seems to be attracting strong support, especially from the city's younger voters. In Nabulus, the nationalist group is backed by politically influential families.

Nationalist candidates are likely to gain seats on the municipal councils of other important West Bank towns like Bethlehem and Ram Allah and in some of the region's smaller communities such as Tulkarm and the college town of Bir Ziet.

Once elected, councils name one of their members, usually the highest vote-getter, as mayor. Israeli occupation authorities, however, can veto these selections and appoint mayors they prefer. The Israelis may use their prerogative to install traditionalist, pro-Jordanian officials if pro-PLO council members are chosen, especially in major towns like Hebron or Nabulus.

Such measures could spark renewed demonstrations and outbursts of violence on the West Bank such as occurred there in recent weeks. The balloting will probably proceed smoothly given the tight security measures the Israelis are likely to take and in view of the fact that all but the most radical fedayeen groups favor holding the elections.

Recent Israeli changes in the old Jordanian election laws—including the enfranchisement for the first time of West Bank women over 21 who meet a minimum tax requirement—have greatly increased the number of eligible voters. Approximately 85,000 West Bankers are now registered, including some 32,000 women and nearly 20,000 men who have registered for the first time.

Many of these new voters are likely to support pro-PLO candidates rather than figures backed by the traditional clan political machines. Women are heavily

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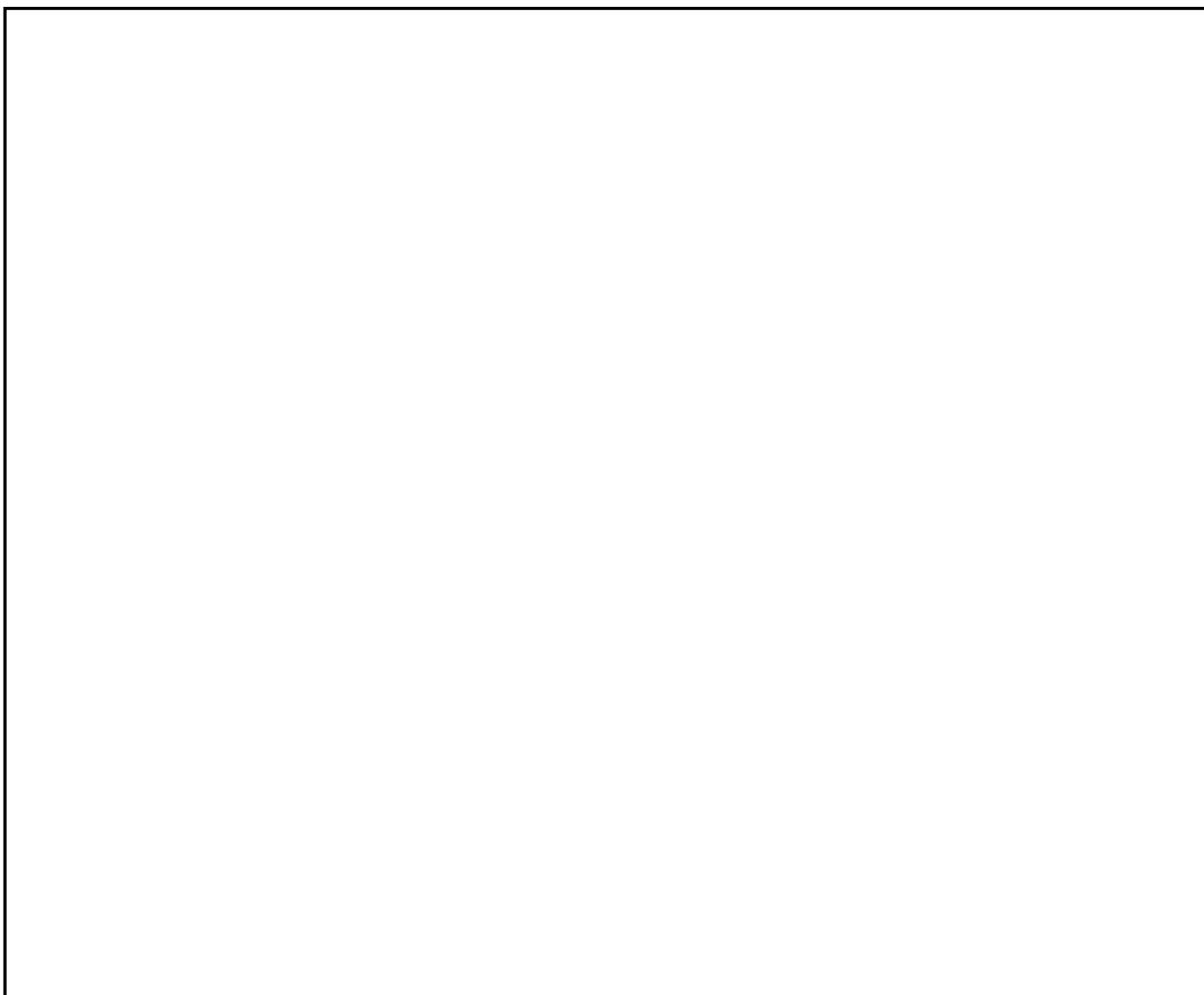
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represented in many West Bank towns, and may become an important factor in West Bank politics. For the first time, women are also campaigning as candidates—two in Nablus and two in smaller towns.

Voter turnout for the elections is likely to be heavy. Over 80 percent of those registered voted in the 1972 elections, as well as in the village council elections held in October and November of last year.

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PORUGAL-AZORES

Azorean leaders are not completely satisfied with the articles on autonomy for the islands in the new Portuguese constitution, but they will probably wait until a government is elected in the archipelago before pressing their demands much further.

The original version of the articles on autonomy was generally accepted in the islands, but was attacked in the constituent assembly by the Communists and their allies. Laboring under a deadline set by Portugal's military leaders, the assembly finally approved the compromise language submitted by a Socialist delegate. The final version gives the national assembly in Lisbon veto power over legislation proposed by the regional Azorean assembly and considerably weakens the powers of a consultative council to be established to rule on the applicability of mainland legislation to the archipelago.

Public discontent with the constitutional provisions has probably led to a resurgence of activity by an extreme right-wing faction of the Azorean Liberation Front, which is believed responsible for graffiti painted early this week on the residences of the US consul and vice consul. Hoping to stem any renewed campaign for immediate independence, local leaders are now pressing the Lisbon military for provisional approval of an Azorean-drawn statute that is designed to supplement the constitution and defines privileges received under autonomy in greater detail.

The statute was presented to the Lisbon government in February, but must be approved by the new national assembly that will be elected on April 25. There is concern among Azorean officials that when the autonomy statute is formally presented by the Azorean assembly to the national assembly for final approval—sometime this summer at the earliest—irreconcilable differences will emerge and pressure will increase for a unilateral declaration of independence, especially if an attempt is made to dissolve the Azorean assembly.

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WEST GERMANY

The West German cabinet has decided to go ahead with production of the multirole combat aircraft, now dubbed the Tornado. The cabinet's decision must be approved by the Bundestag when it considers the matter in early May, and passage is expected.

Of the two other participating countries, London announced its decision to produce the aircraft in late March and there has been no formal announcement from Rome. The West German decision may speak for the Italians, however, since Bonn is already paying the relatively small Italian share of MRCA development costs.

The MRCA is Europe's most ambitious multinational weapons development program. Because uncertainty has plagued the project from its beginnings in 1968, the decision to go ahead with production is a major victory for Panavia, the consortium responsible for overall development of the aircraft. A successful debut by the MRCA could be an important stimulus to the growth of collaborative weapons projects and to the principle of common procurement and standardization in Western Europe.

Co-production is viewed as the only way for West European companies to remain competitive with the US in advanced weapons development and sales in the 1980s. The Panavia consortium may serve as a model for future West European joint military ventures.

Rising costs and engine problems over the last few years raised doubts that the MRCA would ever reach series production. The huge investment already made, however, weighed heavily in the final decisions to produce.

Bonn's share of MRCA program costs is \$6.2 billion, out of a total cost of over \$13 billion. The program will provide 70,000 jobs for West German industry over the next 10 years. The unit cost of the MRCA is now projected by the West Germans at \$10.6 million—more than double the original estimate in 1970 of \$4.6 million—but even the new price is probably understated. We believe that it does not include the necessary spare parts, ground-support equipment, and research and development costs; these would bring the cost to over \$19 million a copy.

The cost of the closest comparable fighter, the US F-111, is about \$15.6 million. Exports outside the Anglo - West German - Italian consortium would lengthen production runs and, thereby, lower unit costs. Canada, Australia, and Japan have expressed interest in the MRCA.

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The MRCA program is about four years behind schedule. Most recently, the flight-test phase has been slowed because of problems with the aircraft's Rolls Royce engine and the crash in February of an Italian prototype. Although Bonn reportedly will start getting ready for series production in July, the air force and navy will not receive their first fighter-bombers until 1979.

Over 800 of the swing-wing aircraft will be produced for the three nations participating in the program. West Germany and Italy will produce 322 and 100 MRCA's, respectively, to replace their F-104G fighters. The British will build 385 MRCA's, of which 165 will be the specialized air-defense version. The British MRCA's will replace several older aircraft, including F-4 interceptors, Buccaneer fighter-bombers, and the Vulcan and Canberra bombers.

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MBFR

The ninth round of the slow-moving force reduction talks in Vienna adjourned yesterday for the spring recess.

During the session, Eastern representatives welcomed the West's December offer to negotiate the withdrawal of some US nuclear forces, but they also criticized it as inadequate. The East continued to reject Western demands for greater ground force reductions on the Eastern side.

The East modified its own reductions proposal in February, and there were indications during the session that it may be preparing to submit data on the nature and size of its forces within the area where reductions will take place. The West has so far, however, detected no sign that the East is prepared to abandon its original objective of maintaining its present force advantage.

In a recent report to the North Atlantic Council, the West's representatives observed that the Eastern proposal was probably intended to neutralize the positive public reaction to the West's December offer.

The next round of the negotiations is scheduled to begin on May 17.

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USSR

Soviet Premier Kosygin told Swedish Prime Minister Palme this week that the Politburo has decided that he and General Secretary Brezhnev should take a rest and "let new political leaders be seen for awhile."

Kosygin said Brezhnev is still on vacation in the Black Sea area. The Soviet Premier, looking fit and relaxed, said that he too had recently been on vacation.

Kosygin's remark about "new political leaders" could refer either to the new members of the Politburo—Leningrad party boss Romanov and party secretary Ustinov—or to the "younger" generation of Soviet leaders. Romanov and Ustinov have not been unusually active in the post-congress period, nor have their normal public appearances been accorded unusual publicity.

Among the "younger" leaders, only Politburo member Kulakov has appeared in a new role. He headed the Soviet delegation at the Bulgarian party congress in late March and early April. This was the first foreign party congress he had attended since becoming a full member of the Politburo in 1971.

The policy of giving relative unknowns greater exposure is apparently not going to be followed at the Czechoslovak party congress that opens Monday. Although there has been no official announcement of the Soviet delegation,

it will be headed by Politburo member Kirilenko, Brezhnev's unofficial deputy and one who has attended such affairs in the past.

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YUGOSLAVIA-USSR

Belgrade believes the recent Soviet party congress placed increased emphasis on orthodoxy in the "socialist community," and it fears Moscow is beginning to make some effort to impose these standards on Yugoslavia.

The chief of staff of the Yugoslav armed forces has told the US military attaché that Moscow is expressing interest in greater access to Yugoslav naval repair facilities. The Yugoslav officer said Belgrade would refuse to ease its extensive legal regulations that restrict use of Yugoslavia's Adriatic ports by foreign navies.

According to a Soviet diplomat in Belgrade, Moscow last month sent a letter to President Tito that complained about offensive articles in the Yugoslav press.

The current round of Yugoslav complaints about the Soviets began while Tito was abroad. Tito's subordinates are inclined to publicize negative Soviet overtures, but Tito believes that a public airing of differences only invites reprisals from Moscow and unwanted attention from other powers such as China. Should the criticism of the Soviets become too shrill, Tito will no doubt again step in to mute it.

The current debate over US policy toward Eastern Europe has added to Belgrade's fear of increased Soviet pressures. The Yugoslav press is apparently playing down the debate, but Tito's likely successors doubtless are concerned over what the Soviets may think about US policy toward Eastern Europe.

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THAILAND

On the strength of his party's victory in the election on April 4, Seni Pramot, leader of the Democrat Party, is casting about to form a new government. The Democrats are 25 seats short of a majority in the national assembly, making a coalition government necessary.

According to most recent reports, the Social Justice, the Social Nationalist, and the Thai Nation parties are the most likely coalition partners. They have 28, 8, and 56 seats, respectively. The inclusion of the Social Justice Party, headed by retired Air Marshal Thawi Chunlasap, and the military-backed Thai Nation Party would bring added support to the Democrats from the military and conservative business elite. The four-party grouping would give the coalition a commanding 67-vote majority in the national assembly.

Earlier, Praman Adireksan, leader of the Thai Nation Party, was reportedly promoting the idea of a two-party coalition with the Democrats and indicated that, in exchange for his party's support, it would want to hold the posts of minister of defense, minister of agriculture and cooperatives, and minister of communications.

It appears, however, that Seni views the Social Justice and the Social Nationalist parties as his primary supporters, mainly because retired General Krit has strong influence over them. Krit gave substantial financial support to Seni and his party, and apparently is a major influence in Seni's plans for the new government. Krit is likely to be named minister of defense in exchange for his continued support.

The Thai Nation Party does not relish assuming the role of the opposition party. It reportedly believes that, if it remained outside the government for an extended period, the party would slowly weaken because it has no strong political ideology to hold it together. It may be prepared to lower its demands in exchange for a voice in the new government.

For his part, Seni would probably welcome the Thai Nation Party as one of several coalition members. With the four parties behind him, Seni would have a powerful majority in the national assembly. He would then be less vulnerable to pressure from any one member of the coalition and from factions within his own party.

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